

THE POCAHONTAS TIMES

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CALVIN W. PRICE, Editor.

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The following article about Rosser and New Creek was prepared for the Randolph County Historical Society, for its annual meeting:

Thomas L. Rosser, a Virginian, entered the Confederate service in 1861, as a Lieutenant in the Washington Artillery, and was first under fire at battle of Bull Run in July of that year, where he was mentioned in the dispatches for his efficient work. He wound up his military career as a major-general at Appomattox in the year 1865, but did not share in the surrender. His unit withdrew in an unostentatious way to Lynchburg and went into voluntary dissolution. Probably the proudest title that he had was the Savior of the Valley, given him by the Federal dispatches in the last twelve months of the war.

During that twelve months three of his most notable exploits were carried out in West Virginia, the surprise at Beverly, the surprise at New Creek, and the great surprise at Cumberland, when Crook and Kelley were captured.

In the language of the Civil War, fighters were classed according to their relative size and importance, as skirmishers, actions, engagements, and battles. They were all more or less fatal. But the New Creek disaster was reported as an "affair." And it was a very important affair to the citizens of that part of West Virginia known as the South Branch Valley.

With the publication of the reports of officers and correspondence generally, it is now seen that the South Branch Valley was to have been devastated as the Shenandoah Valley had been the same year. Sheridan in the Valley of Virginia had received and transmitted orders in the stately military style, coming down from Grant, that the great granary of the South should no longer feed the Rebel Armies. But in discussing it, Sheridan had put it short and forcibly, that the Valley was to be laid waste so that a crow flying over it should carry its own rations.

Fifty years later when Sheridan intimated that he would like to visit the valley again, he would find it in ruins. In the last twelve months of the Civil War, the fact became deeply impressed upon every sensible southern soldier that the Confederate cause was lost, but they were so deeply involved they had but little to look forward to. It was a desperate condition, and they decided to die with guns in their hands. Robert E. Lee finally made a peace with Grant that gave them all the protection that they needed, but they could not have known that in the closing campaigns, their status had not been fixed. Hungry as wolves, the southern soldiers looked forward with the keenest anticipation to the long lines of Federal white-topped army wagons. They fell on these wagon trains and looted and took away arms and ammunition and horses and clothes and in this way they were enabled to carry on. It was during this final year that so many bold raids were made. On the great lakes of the Canadian border Confederates seized and sunk ships, they robbed banks in New England, and they took railroad trains and wagon trains in the Virginias, and made famous rides on Yankee horses and Yankee corn, and in Yankee uniforms, and surprised armed posts. It is apparent that hunger was a splendid spur in those closing days of the great conflict. The United States has not known hunger since. It is a pity that the same cannot be said for this. That is the problem of today.

Grant's order was dated August 5, 1864. It was addressed to Hunter. He was ordered to start in at Harper's Ferry and drive the Confederate armies south, and in pushing up the Valley, he was leaving nothing that would invite the enemy to return. All provisions, forage and stock needed was to be taken, and all the rest destroyed. Buildings were not to be destroyed. The thoughtful historian will construe this to be a hasty and ill-considered order as to the buildings, for it seems to require the soldiers to empty the barns, granaries, and the mills of their contents so that they could be burned at a safe distance from the walls. Imagine a company of soldiers removing the hay from one of those immense Pennsylvania-Dutch barns! Such work would have defeated the order. It was like the time that the English soldiers tried to destroy the potato patches of Ireland, and desisted when it was realized that they had to be dug before they could be destroyed.

Rosser succeeded the popular Tinner Ashby. Ashby was the idol of the Valley. He was killed in action. Rosser was promoted from colonel of the Fifth Virginia Cavalry to this brigade and operated under Early. He became the commander in this way of the McNeill Partisans, of the Hardy County and Hampshire County. This was in January, 1864. January 29, he captured 95 wagons and 300 men at Moorefield. February 4, took Patterson Creek and 1200 cattle and a large number of sheep. June 10, found him pitched against the famous Custer. Took all of Custer's plunder at Green Spring. Lost to Custer at Trevilian the next day when Rosser was wounded. November 27, the New Creek raid. January 11, 1865, the Beverly raid. February 21, raid on Cumberland. April 9, army disbanded and vanished. During that period Rosser represented death. In after years the chubby cheeked cherub was a shrewd, popular politician.

Mention should be made of his exploit at Beverly. It is hard to reconcile the record with the known facts. It is practically impossible to ride a horse a hundred miles in these mountains in a day, but the record is that Rosser left Swopes Depot near Staunton January 10 and took Beverly January 11. It means perhaps that he

had a relay of horses ready. At Swopes Depot he heard that the Eighth and Thirty-fourth Ohio regiments were in winter camp at Beverly in the comfortable cabins there. This meant food, and horses, arms, and ammunition for Rosser and he surprised the camp and took it. The snow was deep on the mountains and there had been rain and the river was high. The night was clear and cold. Owing to the high waters vigilance in the camp was relaxed. There was a dance in Beverly that night. Both Federal colonels and most of the other officers were in attendance. Most of the officers had rooms in town. The Federal camp was east of the pike on Dodson Run north of the town. The pike was well guarded.

At the foot of Cheat Mountain opposite Huttonsville, Rosser took the road at the foot of Cheat Mountain on the east side of the river. About a mile south of the burnt bridge where the highway now crosses, Rosser and his 300 men in blue overcoats continued on a little used road and passed Beverly on the east until they came to the headwaters of Dodson Run, at a place then known as Devil's Hollow. They rode down Dodson Run taking the sentinels as they passed, and at three o'clock in the morning Rosser and his soldiers were pounding on the doors of the cabins and calling on the Federal soldiers to surrender. In the confusion, the Federals lost 7 killed, 30 wounded, and 572 prisoners. No loss by Rosser. Rosser burned the bridge on the Buckhannon road, and took 100 head of horses, 10,000 rations, and a large number of arms and equipments and got back safely to Staunton.

The raid in the Valley of Virginia lasted from August 10, to November 16, 1864, and it was a great catastrophe, especially to the banker and Mennonite farmers who were by their faith non-combatants. The loss fell heavy on Rockingham county, the richest agricultural county in the country. The loss totaled many millions of dollars and all fell on the farmers. Wheat destroyed \$25,802 bushels; hay 29,397 tons; beef cattle, 10,918; sheep, 12,000; swine, 15,000; horses, 3,772; bairs, 12,000; four mills; 71, and other kinds of property in proportion.

October 2, 1864, Sheridan had reached Harrisburg. On that day, a member of Sheridan's staff, Maj. John R. Meigs, riding with some soldiers on the Dayton road attempted to arrest three soldiers in Confederate uniform, the result of which was that Meigs was shot and killed. Sheridan hearing that he had been bushwhacked, gave an order to burn every house within five miles of the spot where Meigs fell, and as a result of this order, some houses were burned. Sheridan reported that it had been carried out. It was one of the most thickly settled portions of Virginia. Within that radius are Harrisburg, Dayton, Mt. Crawford, Bridgewater, Dale Enterprise, Mount Clinton, and other communities. The order was so distasteful to the command that they refused to carry it out, that Sheridan was induced to rescind it. The word of the rescission of the order came just as the regiment had reached Harrisburg to burn it. My birth place was within that five mile radius and I grew up within the sound of the hammer restoring the barns, for they were burned, even if the houses were saved.

Soon after that Sheridan dropped back to Winchester. Some historians place the damage in Rockingham county alone at twenty-five millions of dollars. That county joins Hardy county, and it had an immediate effect upon the prospects of the South Branch Valley, for preparations and orders had been made and issued to treat that region to the same reprisals that the Shenandoah had suffered. The complaint against the South Branch Partisans, a noted independent company, composed of men from the best families of Hardy, Hampshire, and other counties. There is no question but that the rangers were a thorn in the flesh and a ranking fire.

Early in the war, the Federal commanders had recognized the position of the village of New Creek, now the City of Keyser as affording a good location for a fort to control the advances by southern troops on Cumberland and on points north. At this place the Potomac River flows through a rich bottom about a mile and a half long and a half a mile broad. The river at this place flows south east. New Creek flows in from the south at right angles. The river is about a hundred and fifty feet broad and the creek about twenty-five feet broad. The creek flows through a valley. When it comes to the river its valley does not narrow to a V point as is the case with most mountain streams, but is blocked by a peculiar ridge, about five hundred yards long and about two hundred feet high which forms the southern boundary of the Potomac Valley, and which blocked the foot of the New Creek Valley. New Creek flows by this dyke on the eastern end where there is room for the road and creek. On the western end there is another gap that had a wood road through it at the time we write about. The village was at the east end of the valley on the river. The ridge described above accompanied the approach on the main road down New Creek and

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at the same time controlled the valley on the river. On that ridge, a fort was erected, afterwards called Fort Kelley, and was fitted out with four twelve pounders, one six pounder and one rifled gun, as well as some field artillery available from time to time. This fort was considered to be a regular Gibraltar from which six or seven hundred men could hold all the forces that the South could bring against it and find standing room. The Confederates had tried to take it by batteries from a near by mountain, but had such a time of it that the attempt had been speedily abandoned.

In November, 1864, there was about 850 troops in the garrison, commanded by Col. Geo. B. Latham. Crook commanded the Department of West Virginia. Kelley commanded troops on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad west of Hancock, Maryland, a point opposite Berkeley Springs. November 25, 1864, Kelley modified the order issued on November 24, by Latham to destroy the South Branch Valley, to this extent: "Inform the people of Moorefield and South Branch Valley that if they continue to harbor and feed McNeill's men that the whole valley will be laid waste like the Shenandoah Valley."

Latham laid out a campaign to take the Partisans as McNeill's rangers were called in Moorefield. Col. R. E. Fleming with 120 men was to proceed by the direct route to Moorefield by way of Burlington with artillery and be at Moorefield on the morning of the 28th, on the west side. Major Peter J. Potts with 150 men was to proceed by the direct route to Moorefield from the north, and capture them. Crook a few days later was to command Kelley's effort to bag mountain guerrillas.

It is safe to say that from high lookouts that the Partisans knew every move that the stylish and well equipped Federal armies were doing. One of the results was that Rosser being in Moorefield with about two thousand men did not wait there. Fleming gave Potts a day's start on the swing around, and he marched out of Burlington on the 27th, and got to the ford of the river three miles from Moorefield where he was attacked and defeated by about three hundred of Rosser's men, and a horse race was had by all from the ford of the South Branch river to New Creek where Fleming returned on the 27th of November, and left Potts on his encircling movement not knowing that his allied army had been chased back to the Gibraltar. Potts arrived promptly and on time at Moorefield on the morning of the 28th, and instead of attacking, he barely made his escape, fording the South Branch river south of Moorefield and winning his way to the B. & O. tracks somewhere south of Piedmont. The command got back to New Creek late in the day on the 29th.

In the meantime on the south side of Moorefield, on the South Fork (not South Branch) the Pendleton and Randolph County, State troops, known as the Swamp Dragoons, but referred to in the dispatches by Kelley as the "Swamps", forded the third side of the bagging movement so fervently damned by Crook. The regulars were always willing to put the State troops on the firing line in West Virginia, and then never recognize them after the war socially or financially. The record is silent as to what became of the Swamp Dragoons, but no harm befell them. Their feet were on their native heath.

So darkness came on the evening of the 27th. Victorious but hungry, Rosser and his men knew that in the fortress that there was food for man and beast. Then he made a plan. As soon as Fleming had been forced back the wires began to sing with messages and Latham was warned and doubly warned that the next thing would be an attack on New Creek, with its rich

depot of supplies. It got on Latham's nerves so that he established no less than four picket posts on the New Creek road with the strictest instructions to give the alarm in case of an advance on the part of the enemy. Rosser on his part ransacked his wagon for blue uniforms and by morning had fitted out a troop of a hundred and fifty men in Federal uniforms and equipments. Waiting until the day was well advanced he sent this troop over the hill to make believe that they were the Potts expedition returning to the fort. The bogus company rode carelessly down the road. The first picket post that they came to received them with shouts of derision. They had welcomed Fleming and his men back the same way. The pickets would be glad to know what kind of a time they had had with McNeill's rangers and where did they have their scalps and their prisoners. And why had they not brought one of Jess McNeill's front teeth for a souvenir. And presently they were enveloped by 150 men and looked in the muzzle of dozens of Colt pistols, and surrendered.

The troop picked up each one of the four picket posts in the same way and rode into New Creek with some two or three thousand of Rosser's men following them closely, to find not a man in place, and very few shots fired. The Federals had four men wounded and 443 men captured. The Confederates lost three men killed.

The artillery consisted of three pieces of field artillery and the six pieces of siege guns in the fort. As soon as the Confederates entered the town they rushed upon the fort and captured the big guns. There were about 160 soldiers in the fort and they were overpowered at once. The battle was over in a few minutes. None of the big guns was fired, and this indicates the measure of the surprise. The Confederates reported that they had spiked the cannon in the fort, and brought out the field artillery, 700 prisoners, and 1500 horses, and about the same number of cattle.

Both reports agree as to the general destruction of the supplies at that place filling large ware houses. The Federal report intimates that the town was burned, but I think only that part of it that was used for storing army supplies. Five miles away was the railroad town of Piedmont where the engine and machine shops of the B. & O. were located. A force under Major McDonald, a former resident of New Creek, was sent to take that place, but Captain John Fisher, of the Sixth West Virginia Infantry, and thirty-five men were able to stand them off so that the damage was limited to the burning of but one round house, the rest of the plant and the engines being saved. McDonald left two dead and took away some wounded. Fisher having taken to the hill and firing from a safe place had no wounded.

The quartermaster's estimate of the property destroyed by fire at New Creek amounted to \$123,382.34, in addition to the damage done to the fort and equipment, and the property taken away.

As can be imagined, Colonel Latham, who had had a perfect record, was in a bad fix on account of a surprise about which he had been so fully warned. Kelley placed him under arrest for a court-martial, and passed it on to Crook who did it and Latham retired to Grafton to chew the bitter cud of reflection. Kelley's preemptory order to put the fort in condition for defense on the 28th, which had been ignored, except as to eight miles of picket posts, was the worst feature against Latham. He was found guilty and ordered dismissed but later the order was revoked and he was given an honorable discharge March 19, 1865.

The strangest case is that of Crook. He had ordered the court-martial of the two Beverly colonels, Youart and Furney, for being surprised. He had court-martialed Latham for being surprised. And when he was himself surprised along with Kelley in



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Cumberland a few weeks later, there was no question of court-martial. Grant hastened to exchange him and put him to work. Crook was to learn however that the best of men may suffer from surprise.

Sheriff's Sale Mrs. Amos R. Doyle vs. Harry Blackhurst et al. In the Circuit Court of Pocahontas County, W. Va. By virtue of an execution to me directed in the above cause, I have levied upon and will, on the 4th day of May, 1929, between the hours of 10 o'clock a. m. and 4 o'clock p. m. at the residence and office of Dr. A. E. Burner, in the town of Durbin, West Virginia, in the County of Pocahontas and State of West Virginia proceed to sell to the highest bidder, the following described property, to-wit: 1 Erskine car, 4 bedstead and bedding, 3 dressers, 2 heating stoves, 1 radio, 1 dining table, 1 set of dining chairs, 1 piano, 1 cook stove, 1 parlor suite, 1 buffet and other household and kitchen furniture. Also the following office equipment: 1 safe, 1 library, 1 desk, 5 chairs, 1 operating table, and other office fixtures and equipment. Terms of Sale - CASH S. REID MOORE, S. P. C. R. O. Crowley, Deputy Sheriff. Continued by order of the plaintiff, to the 15th day of June, 1929.

Sheriff's Sale Mrs. Amos Doyle vs. Harry Blackhurst et al. In the Circuit Court of Pocahontas County, W. Va. By virtue of an execution to me directed in the above cause, I have levied upon and will, on the 3rd day of May, 1929, between the hours of 10 o'clock a. m. and 4 o'clock p. m. at the residence of Harry Blackhurst, in the town of Cass, in the County of Pocahontas, and State of West Virginia, proceed to sell to the highest bidder, the following described property, to-wit: 3 mitch cows, 2 calves, 1 yearling heifer, 1 piano, 1 cook stove, 5 beds and bedding, 1 sewing machine, 1 dining table, 1 chiffonier, 1 side cupboard, 5 dressers, 2 cupboards, 1 radio, 1 Victrola, 1 lot of chairs, and other household and kitchen furniture. Terms of Sale - CASH S. REID MOORE, S. P. C. R. O. Crowley, Deputy Sheriff. Continued by order of the plaintiff to the 14th day of June, 1929.

Order of Publication State of West Virginia. At rules held in the office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Pocahontas county, West Virginia, on the first Monday in the month of April, 1929, Artie Marie Waugh vs. Renick Hanson Waugh. The object of the above entitled suit is to obtain by the plaintiff Artie Marie Waugh from the defendant Renick Hanson Waugh, a divorce from the bonds of matrimony, and for general relief. This day came the plaintiff, by her attorney and upon his motion, and it appearing from affidavit filed in this cause that the defendant, Renick Hanson Waugh, is a non-resident of the State of West Virginia, it is therefore ordered that he do appear here within one month from the date of the first publication hereof and do what is necessary to protect his interest in this suit. Teste: D. C. ADRISON, Clerk E. R. HILL, Atty.

SILOS I am selling ECONOMY SILOS in Pocahontas and Randolph Counties. This silo has been tried out in this region and they are giving the best of satisfaction. They are reasonable in price. Let me talk with you. C. C. BEALE, Linwood, W. Va.

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Automobiles For Sale Three-fourth ton truck, made from Hudson car, fine shape; particularly good for farm service. One Buick Sedan, 1925 model, good as new, 5 passenger. One Hudson coach, 1925 model, good as new, 5 passenger. Both cars well equipped. Cash or well secured note. Apply at once to C. I. Adams, Stony Bottom West Virginia.

Farm For Sale 172 acres five miles east of Dunmore. Seven room house; good barn, cellar and other out buildings. Close to school and church. Come and look it over. Jesse Hudson.

Farm For Sale This property lies in the western part of Greenbrier county, W. Va. It consists of 48 1/2 acres, all cleared except twelve acres of 60,000 to 70,000 feet of sawable timber. Two-story frame house, out buildings, and good orchard. \$500 cash and annual payments on the remainder will be accepted. Here is your opportunity to get a good home for a reasonable price. For further particulars write A. R. Thompson, Lewisburg, W. Va.

For Sale Store Building Good location on railroad siding. Also small stock of merchandise. JOHNIE HILL, Lobeila, W. Va. Farm for Sale 121 acre farm situated above 4 miles from Staunton, Va.; land fertile, gently rolling, all cleared except 4 acres, in woods, water pumped to house and barn, line barn 7 room house, stables fitted for dairy. W. F. Deekens, Staunton, Va. Dahlia Bulbs Mixed colors and varieties. Each postage paid. Mrs. A. J. McCumb, Huntersville, W. Va.

Commissioner's Notice State of West Virginia vs. 40 acres of land and Frank W. Houchin and the heirs of J. L. Houchin, deceased, to-wit: Neal Houchin, Roy Houchin, and Cecil Houchin, and other heirs of J. L. Houchin. This cause is referred to P. T. Ward, one of the Commissioners in Chancery of this Court, who will take, state and report to court the following matters of account, to-wit: First: The location and description of the above named tract of 40 acres. Second: Whether said land is forfeited for non-entry on the land books of Pocahontas County. Third: The amount of taxes, interest and cost necessary to redeem the same. Fourth: The names of the persons entitled to redeem. Fifth: Any other matter to be specially stated deemed pertinent by the commissioner or any party in interest. But before taking said account the said commissioner shall publish and post for four successive weeks the notice required by chapter 105 of the Code of West Virginia. P. T. WARD, Commissioner.

State of West Virginia vs. 40 acres of land, Frank W. Houchin, and the heirs of J. L. Houchin, deceased, to-wit: Neal Houchin, Roy Houchin and Cecil Houchin, and any other heirs of J. L. Houchin. The plaintiff and each and all of the above named defendants, and all unknown heirs and claimants and owners of any part or parcel of the lands mentioned in the plaintiff's bill in the above entitled cause, will take notice, that on the 16th day of May, 1929, at my office in the Town of Marlinton in the County of Pocahontas, I will commence the discharge of my duties under the decree of reference in the above entitled cause, a copy of which decree is published with this notice; at which time and place, you and each of you can attend and protect and defend any interest you may have in the lands, or any of them, in question in this suit. Given under my hand this 16th day of April, 1929. P. T. WARD, Commissioner.

Horses For Sale I have for sale at my place near Cass, good horses for sale as follows: One 9-year old horse, 1400 pounds, broke for farm and woods. One 3-year old horse, 1200 pounds. One 2-year old mare, and one yearling mare colt. Terms: Four months time, note and interest with approved security. WARD McLAUGALIN, Cass, W. Va.

Teams for Sale Three young teams broke to woods, weigh 1400 to 1700, well matched. Harness too. Glen Galford, Greenbank, W. Va.

Farm For Sale 172 acres five miles east of Dunmore. Seven room house; good barn, cellar and other out buildings. Close to school and church. Come and look it over. Jesse Hudson.

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Corn Planter for Sale One horse cornplanter, Blackhawk, with fertilizer and all other attachments for sale at half price - \$15.00. Nearly new. I have a two-horse planter and do not need this one. Ward Wimer, Millpoint, W. Va. TURKEYS for Sale 5 toms, Bird Brothers Gold Bank Browns, pure bred; price \$7.00. Also turkey eggs in season, price \$5.00; setting eggs, White Rock \$1.25 for 15 Thompson Barred Rocks, setting of 15 eggs \$1.25. Mrs. A. S. Gay Marlinton, W. Va.

NOTICE Valuable real estate in the Town of Durbin, West Virginia, consisting of one five room bungalow dwelling house and all necessary out buildings, nearly new, and three lots. Reason for selling, my business calls me away. Any one interested, call or write, Tony Zellar, Durbin, W. Va. For Sale 1 two bottom tractor plow, Oliver make, good as new, also 1 two-horse Brannington ten disk, in good shape; 1 good Jersey cow or will trade for stock cow, also 8 Poland China pigs. Apply to S. C. Galford, Linwood, W. Va. Dahlias for Sale Dahlia tubers from .10c to \$2.00 each. Gladioli bulbs .03c to 25c each. Write for price list. Mrs. F. C. Nickell, Cass, W. Va. Eggs For Hatching Rose Comb Silversead Wyandott Eggs \$1.00 per 15, also Single Comb Rhode Island Red Eggs 75c per 15. Eggs postpaid. JOHNIE HILL, Lobeila, W. Va. Farm for Sale 121 acre farm situated above 4 miles from Staunton, Va.; land fertile, gently rolling, all cleared except 4 acres, in woods, water pumped to house and barn, line barn 7 room house, stables fitted for dairy. W. F. Deekens, Staunton, Va. Dahlia Bulbs Mixed colors and varieties. Each postage paid. Mrs. A. J. McCumb, Huntersville, W. Va.

Advertisement for Pontiac Big 6 cars. Text: 'Before you buy a car it's wise to compare with THE NEW PONTIAC BIG 6. Some people make a fundamental mistake when they go to buy a car. They receive a demonstration and they compare the new car only with the car they are about to trade. To help you avoid this mistake we have arranged a special demonstration of the New Pontiac Big Six. See the others, by all means. But see the New Pontiac Big Six, if only for the sake of comparison.' Includes contact information for Williams Motor Company, Marlinton, West Virginia.